DEPARTMENT OF STATE

CONFIDENTIAL

BRIEFING PAPER

SUBJECT: African Refugee Conference and U.S. Support for Refugee Relief in Africa

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The Issue

An international conference on assistance to African refugees is being organized by the UN Secretary General, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Secretariat of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to take place in Geneva April 9-10, 1981. The idea for this conference stems from a comparison which Africans have made between the refugee assistance which they have received and the levels of aid accorded to Indochinese refugees over the past two years. Also, pledging conferences have been an important feature of the effort to raise funds for Indochinese refugees.

The difficulties inherent in applying the same tactic in Africa are manifold. This is due to the sizeable number of African countries which potentially could become involved and to the widely varying degree of need which exists among the many refugee situations in Africa. Finally, the desperation of many African states to find means of dealing with problems of failing economies and underdevelopment creates the risk that the conference could become a highly-disorganized marketplace of unrealistic expectations.

Discussion

According to the UN Undersecretary General responsible for African affairs, the Conference on International Assistance to African Refugees is the "climax of an effort to review, assess and document the refugee relief needs of concerned African nations." The deeper reason for the conference, however, is that the OAU and several African states contend that the burgeoning refugee problem on their continent is being given inadequate attention by both the UN and donor countries which have supported refugee relief in other world regions, especially Indochina. Estimates of African refugees vary between three and five million. The majority of anyone's count (over two million) is in the Horn, with other major concentrations in central and southern Africa. The conference is being convoked to secure additional resources over and above the $113 million budgeted for Africa by the Executive Committee of the UNHCR at its annual meeting in October, 1980.

The U.S. views the African refugee situation as a humanitarian problem with serious political ramifications. In the past, we have channelled most of our cash (as opposed to food) assistance through the UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and have tried to be responsive to those emergency situations where there were genuinely life-threatening circumstances. Over the past two years such conditions have existed in Somalia, Cameroon, Zaire, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Uganda. The sudden crisis nature of the conflicts that produce refugees and the need to spread the

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costs of refugee relief among as many donors as possible have argued for U.S. assistance to be given through multilateral organizations even if the performance of these organizations in some cases is not as efficient as would be desired. Sometimes, however, particularly urgent needs have required rapid bilateral action.

Despite the proliferation of refugee crises in Africa, it is true that the situation there has not been as widely publicized as refugee problems elsewhere. To some extent this is because the governments and populations of African asylum countries generally have been hospitable to refugees, and thus no dramatic publicity has resulted. Moreover, the condition of being a refugee in Africa is widely viewed as temporary.

U.S. assistance to refugee relief programs in Africa is subject to competing priorities. Of a total of about $1.2 billion in U.S. assistance to Africa in FY 1980, approximately $116 million was for refugee aid. This compared to about $650 million which the U.S. provided to refugee relief worldwide. Precise advance budgeting is difficult because the need for refugee relief usually is unpredictable.

The overlapping nature of manmade and natural disasters complicates relief efforts in some cases where drought and/or famine situations coexist with conditions of conflict and civil disorder. Also people usually are displaced within the borders of their own countries by the same events that cause others to flee across borders. These complications require coordination and cooperation which is difficult to achieve within governments and almost always impossible between governments.

An almost universal constraint on refugee relief activities in Africa is the underdevelopment of most of the areas where refugees are located. An influx of refugees makes severe demands on limited infrastructure, personnel and resources, and the government of the asylum country then turns to outside donors and international organizations for assistance. Yet at times the degree of organization and infrastructure which is needed to make a relief program work simply is unavailable no matter how much money there is. Somalia is a case in point.

Because the level of development of most asylum countries is so low, and because many recognize that underdevelopment is a constraint to efficient relief programs, a significant risk exists that those organizing the conference will devise an impossibly ambitious package of proposals. Thus far, we have taken the position that the conference should not be expected to resolve Africa's major development needs. We should continue to seek to avoid any tendency to use the conference to obtain support for broad development which African countries have been unable to fund through other channels.

Time Constraints

The theme and date of the conference have been set. It is essential that the U.S. continue to influence preparations for the conference in such

a way as to limit expectations and to hold the focus of the conference on real and urgent needs. This should be accomplished through ongoing consultations between donor governments and representatives of the UN Secretary General, the UNHCR, and the OAU Secretariat.

Secretary Muskie assured UN High Commissioner Hartling on November 17 that he would stress the importance of African refugee programs to the new Administration and agreed with Hartling that it is necessary for Africans to be convinced that their refugee needs are not ignored. Over the past two years there has been growing Congressional interest in African refugee programs, and the Administration's budget proposals were increased by Congress in FY 1979 and FY 1980. Public interest has also increased substantially, particularly in the plight of the million or more refugees in Somalia who have been the subject of wide media coverage.

U.S. Actions

The attached table shows the rapid growth in the Africa refugee programs and the USG response. It has been our policy to try to contribute one third of the UNHCR and ICRC program costs in Africa, leaving the rest to other donors. Figures for the total multilateral and bilateral contributions of all donors are not available. On the average, the U.S. is the largest donor to UNHCR programs in Africa. The European Community is a close second, and the Scandinavian nations and individual nations of the EC provide the bulk of the remainder.

With respect to the refugee conference, it is obvious that those international agencies and donor government offices which are being drawn into the effort would not have the expertise and funds needed to tackle extensive development activities. We have suggested, therefore, that although the UNGA resolution calling for the conference refers to the impact of refugee flows on the development of African countires, the April meeting should in fact concentrate on emergency relief needs and certain related "critical" infrastructural needs. A separate effort, which would have to be prepared carefully in terms of specific project proposals and participation by development agencies, could be mounted later to address the issue of long-term assistance for resettlement.

Whatever form the conference takes, there is no provision in our proposed FY '81 and '82 budgets for the kind of substantial contribution which the African nations, international organizations and other donors may expect of us.

Our objectives then should be: (1) limit the focus and goals of the conference in a reasonable manner, (2) ensure that requests can be addressed over several years, and (3) create during the planning for the conference a spirit of cooperation and realism which will avoid dashed expectations.

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		CY/FY 1979	CY/FY 1980	CY/FY 1981*	CY/FY 1982*
1.	Total UNHCR programs in Africa	74.16	148.1	160	180
2.	U.S. contribution to UNHCR programs	21.01	45.1	33	60
3.	Total ICRC programs in Africa	N/A	30.0	50	51
4.	U.S. contributions to ICRC programs	4.01	5.0	7	17
5.	Other U.S. contributions to refugee programs in Africa	18.14	9.0	12	12
6.	Total U.S. non-food contributions to refugee programs on Africa	43.16	59.1	52	89
7.	Total U.S. food (PL-480 Title II) contributions to refugee programs in Africa (including transport costs)	11.59	56.8*	--	--
8.	Total of items 6 and 7:	54.75	115.9		
9.	Appropriations requested for U.S. contributions to refugee programs in Africa (non-food)	23.12	35.6	52	79
10.	Appropriations received for U.S. contributions to refugee programs in Africa (non-food)	38.12	49.9	--	--
11.	Amount spent for U.S. contributions to refugee programs in Africa (including allocations from emergency funds and reprogramming)	43.15	56.1	--	--
12.	Total U.S. contributions to refugee programs in Asia	108.76	365.4	--	--
13.	Total U.S. contributions to refugee programs in Europe/ Near East	73.52	97.3	--	--
14.	Total U.S. contributions to UNRWA	32.0	35.2	--	--

* Estimates

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